

## State of the City Address 2023

Good morning.

I stand here today in awe. In awe of the two years behind us, and in awe of the two years that lie ahead. The mountains we have climbed. The valleys we have crossed. I have never been prouder of Springfieldians and their determination. Their grit. Their resilience. These are the times that try all souls. And yet, we are not only the sum of our experiences, or the toll of our troubles. It is true that our world is complicated. At times it may even seem things are so divisive that our lights have dimmed. Springfieldians, the lights have not dimmed. The light of inspiration shines on.

Moving forward.... let us be inspired by places like this...Evangel...the halls of higher education ....education lifts up the promise of ten thousand tomorrows.

Let us be inspired by the spaces we hold dear, like our places of worship, our town coffee shops, our neighborhoods, and our libraries filled with the stories that transport us to new horizons.

Inspiration is everywhere...if you just take time to look.

This is a time to heal. A time to dream. It is a time to move forward.

The signs of progress are everywhere. The voters overwhelmingly approved initiatives such as Proposition S and the Hotel-Motel tax and make it clear they want us to invest in our community and make forward progress. We can do that best by focusing on what unites us and working together to achieve it.

We must move forward past the division we have seen, by uniting around the common vision of our comprehensive plan - Forward SGF - and working together to accomplish its goals.

We must move forward to see further reductions of the crime rate by getting the Springfield Police Department to full staffing, making sure training is sound, pay is competitive, and necessary equipment is provided. We also need to address the root causes of crime—including mental health and drug issues.

We must continue to support our firefighters, providing them with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, and investing in their training and initiatives that reduce community risks of all types.

We must move forward - increasing quality jobs and continuing to reduce the poverty rate. Thanks to the work of Francine Pratt leading a cross-sectional initiative called Prosper Springfield, the city ended 2022 just shy of meeting its 10-year, 5 percent poverty reduction goal – in only **seven** years. Post-secondary educational attainment is up 1.8 percent, and 60 percent of our population age 16 and older is participating in the workforce. This work is ongoing and collaborative

and expands each year as we move ever closer to a truly inclusive Springfield that promotes prosperity for all.

We must move forward with things like code revisions that benefit the entire city and provide clear standards for desired growth, thereby avoiding the type of case-by-case conflicts that pit neighbor against neighbor.

We are moving forward with steps to improve and increase the quality of our housing stock. Currently, we are in the middle of the City's most comprehensive housing study in history – an effort that will help us close our housing gap and rejuvenate neighborhoods in need. Programs like Restore SGF, a new community development organization, encourage investment in Springfield's historic neighborhoods and bring new inspiration to thousands of home owners and soon-to-be-home owners across the city. Thank you, former City Councilman Richard Ollis, our many private sector partners in the banking industry, City staff and Representative Bill Owen, for your leadership in this area. Restore SGF is just the sort of initiative that can improve quality of life in our neighborhoods and ensure that Springfield has quality housing stock in all four corners of the city.

We must continue to find workable solutions to address our nuisance property issue and hold those accountable for letting our housing stock and neighborhoods deteriorate. I am proud to say that Springfield was one of 10 municipalities across three states selected to send a delegation to the 2023 Vacant Property Leadership Institute. This a training program that equips leaders with the skills to address

vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties for the benefit of their communities.

I am excited to move forward with major capital improvements like the daylighting of Jordan Creek, improvements at Cooper Sports Complex and the Field House and the visioning for Lake Springfield. These projects will improve our quality of life, quality of place and support local businesses through increased tourism. Springfield has seen unprecedented levels of investment due to prudent savings in the past and through state and federal funding support. We have listened to you and responded by being cautious, yet strategic stewards of these funds.

Thank you, Senator Lincoln Hough and our state legislative delegation. Senator Hough continued to deliver for Southwest Missouri, and indeed the entire state of Missouri again this year as Missouri's Senate Appropriations Chair. His collaborative work will reverberate for generations to come – throughout the entire state of Missouri. Thank you, my friend. ((applause))

It was rewarding to move forward by securing the opportunity to keep the Springfield Cardinals in our community this past year by purchasing Hammons Field. Continuing that tradition of family fun is so much more than baseball. Baseball is about celebrating the past, paying attention to detail, process, and the small things, but working to get the next win and the next championship. We need to take the same approach in building and growing our community as we think bigger, and we move boldly.

We are at our best when we come together. In a couple of months, we will celebrate Springfield's unique place in history as the Birthplace of Route 66. In 1926, the official telegram naming Route 66 was transmitted to Washington, D.C. by a group of visionaries right here in Springfield. While the official road was decommissioned in 1985, Route 66 remains a significant pop culture icon. The lure of the open road draws travelers to Springfield from all around the planet, and a new generation of road trippers has begun to explore Route 66 again. I encourage you all to come celebrate the Mother Road with us this summer at the annual Birthplace of Route 66 festival – and – learn about some exciting plans to lead efforts across the state of Missouri as we gear up for the 2026 100-year anniversary of the Mother Road.

Whether it is getting our kicks or taking the country roads home, together, we must move forward on partnerships across southwest Missouri that benefit our entire region. Projects such as the Chadwick Flyer Trail, which offers a vital connection between the City of Ozark and the City of Springfield could unite communities, physically and metaphorically. Springfield is our state's third largest metro, and this project highlights our collaborative spirit and allows us to come together around not only a part of our history, but also our future. It will allow us to celebrate and develop our unique identity of place and foster an experience economy that supports recreation, culture, and tourism. Best of all, it will connect us to our beautiful outdoors.

Speaking of the beautiful outdoors, we are pleased with the forward movement of our plans to reinvent Lake Springfield and the decommissioned power station, where hundreds of people have been attending public engagement opportunities to dream about the future. Without the large planning grant from the Economic Development Administration, this visioning could not be possible. When I met with EDA leaders, they reiterated what so many people recognize about Springfield: unprecedented collaboration and the will to make visions a reality.

Springfield continues to be a major economic hub – providing jobs, healthcare, education, transportation and a high quality of life. We appreciate working with surrounding counties and cities because a rising tide floats all boats. We are moving forward with looking at ways to grow our City limit boundaries, while partnering with regional communities that share our unique Midwest America quality of place: like Northwest Arkansas and Branson. Our region should be a force with which to be reckoned, and not a best-kept secret.

We must move forward on making Springfield the premier place to live and work for all employees. We are a fast-growing city with a workforce that is increasing faster than the national average. Springfield ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation in job growth, among mid-size cities; in the top 5 in the nation for economic strength; is a top city for young professionals... and recognized as being among the top 100 cities nationwide as a best place for businesses and careers. In a recent story in the Wall Street Journal, Springfield earned the top spot on a list of cities that are great for remote workers. The Journal article identified cities with qualities people say they want most when working remotely.

Springfield's economic strength and consistent growth, continues to buoy us through often uncertain times. Our diverse industry base and strong foundational employers in health care and education is complemented by strong employers in the fields of information technology, logistics and manufacturing.

The Ozark Technical Community College Plaster Center for Advanced Manufacturing continues to deliver on its promise to be an economic catalyst for the entire region. As the first advanced manufacturing training facility in the state, the center not only educates the next generation of workers, but it attracts new businesses to the area looking to hire these highly skilled graduates. Please join me in recognizing recent graduates from OTC, Solomon Counsil and Janie Dunkin - and OTC Chancellor Hal Higdon.

At the Jordan Valley Innovation Center, a new project fortifies the ecosystem of manufacturers focused on advanced technology. Recently, Missouri State University put out a call for projects for the Advanced Manufacturing Node Grant program. Competitive grants go to private sector projects that will focus on technology, infrastructure or workforce development to support and grow the semiconductor industry sector in Missouri. The Jordan Valley Innovation Center is a place for MSU researchers and corporate partners to conduct cutting-edge research and development in a collaborative environment. The center's \$14.3 million dollar expansion is well underway – with the City providing upgrades to nearby streetscape, stormwater and sewer infrastructure. Adjacent to the Jordan Creek Daylighting site, this enhancement to the IDEA Commons will further our downtown development.

Progress also continues on O'Reilly Hospitality's \$19 million dollar investment in a redevelopment project, the Moxy Hotel, as well as continue construction on a 53 thousand square-foot Buc-ees store in north Springfield – the very first one in Missouri - and a \$20 million commercial development in southwest Springfield.

We continue to grow our workforce through industry showcases like Build My Future – introducing more than 1600 students from 86 schools to jobs in construction trade. Springfield continues to expand the availability of apprenticeships and workforce training in many ways. Thanks to support from the federal government, the City of Springfield Department of Workforce Development recently opened enrollment into the Apprenticeship Building America training program, a \$3 million grant funded by the United States Department of Labor. The grant aims to serve more than 12 hundred apprentices over the next three years in a 10-county region around Springfield.

Registered apprenticeships are now available in manufacturing, healthcare, public safety, education, renewable energy, information technology, construction, transportation/distribution and logistics. The apprenticeship model works. We are thankful for the opportunity to combine classroom learning with hands-on experience and provide wages to apprentices while they earn a nationally recognized credential from the Department of Labor.

The \$17.5 million dollar Good Jobs Challenge grant has opened the door to more than 2,800 individuals with job training and placement opportunities over the



next three years. It will spur economic growth and strengthen the pipeline of skilled workers as well. It is one of the largest grants ever awarded to the City of Springfield.

The significance of this workforce development and training increases the need to build upon the successes of our Partnership Industrial Center East and Partnership Industrial Center West. Make no mistake. Springfield and Greene County are significant talent hubs. Even during the worst economic effects of the pandemic, area businesses demonstrated an incredible ability to innovate. Our strong economy makes our region attractive for both new and existing businesses to expand operations. I send this message to industries far and wide: Springfield is open for business. We are ready to move forward to meet the needs of the future!

Due to the collaborative work of the City of Springfield, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Greene County, City Utilities and additional partners throughout the region through the Springfield Regional Economic Partnership, there are currently 28 active projects, nine with existing businesses and 19 with new businesses considering a location in our region. Most of these projects are in the manufacturing sector, with additional projects in logistics, information technology, and other industries.

These projects are not yet guaranteed to locate in the Springfield region, but represent a *potential* 9,046 new jobs, \$136 million in new payroll, and \$6.4 billion in new investment.

In 2022, the Springfield Regional Economic Partnership worked 48 projects, winning 12 of those projects, with the majority of those being manufacturers.

Several new developments are taking shape and will have a significant impact in the near future.

The region has prided itself on creating an environment that is welcoming to entrepreneurs, startup businesses and young professionals. Missouri State University's eFactory – Springfield's home base for dreamers - encourages new business ideas and serves as a business incubator.

The Network for Young Professionals, a committee of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, aids in placemaking efforts by encouraging the area's young professionals to get involved and plant roots in the community. The future really belongs to our young professionals and I am pleased many of them are showing an interest in leadership at all levels in the community. With the most recent election, our average age on City Council dropped by a decade! Would Bryant Young, current president of The Network and any Network members present please stand and be recognized?

Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife Museum & Aquarium was once again named America's Best Aquarium in 2023, as hundreds of thousands of visitors came to Springfield to enjoy both the museum and the Granddaddy of all outdoor stores, Bass Pro Shops. We are blessed to have Missouri's number one tourist destination right here in our own backyard. Thank you, Johnny Morris, and your team, for the

exceptional work you do both for Springfield and around the world, as you shed important light on conservation and the importance of providing our kids with the knowledge and inspiration to enjoy the great outdoors.

The City's Public Works Department continues to invest in projects that improve quality of place, with a particular focus on improving our outdoor public spaces. With highly skilled professional and collaborative staff, the Public Works department is responsive to the need for quality infrastructure. The following highlighted projects will have a big impact on our city.

Improvements to naturalize Fassnacht Creek at the Springfield Art Museum were named 2022 Project of the Year by the Missouri Chapter of American Public Works Association. The goal of the project was to provide flood mitigation benefits to the Art Museum and surrounding properties, as well as water quality and urban wildlife habitat improvements.

Progress continues at the Art Museum - Springfield's oldest cultural institution, with nearly \$16 million raised toward a transformative capital project. Governor Mike Parson announced a \$2.7 million dollar grant from the Missouri Department of Economic Development, recognizing the museum's value in the region in attracting visitors.

After two years of community-wide engagement, stakeholder and partner agency coordination and engineering design, construction of the Grant Avenue Parkway roadway improvement project began in May 2022. The project will connect

Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium, with downtown Springfield. Development is already occurring. The City adopted the Redevelopment Plan for Grant Avenue Parkway Area – a 265-acre area surrounding the north half of the Grant Avenue Parkway Corridor, located between Fasnicht Park and West College Street. The purpose of the Redevelopment Plan is to remove blight and redevelop the Grant Avenue Parkway corridor and surrounding areas consistent with the GAP Corridor Plan and the Forward SGF Comprehensive Plan. Redevelopment projects that are consistent with the plan may qualify for incentives.

In all, almost \$20 million dollars in federal infrastructure grants were announced in 2022, awarding the City of Springfield millions of dollars in funds to improve stormwater and right of way infrastructure and impact economic vitality in Springfield. Thanks to a Governor's Cost-Share Grant, the City was awarded \$1.5 million in matching funds for the extension of North Eastgate Ave to North LeCompte. This project is projected to facilitate development of approximately 180 acres for industrial use, which upon full build-out, may include over \$386 million dollars of new capital investment and nearly 1,400 new jobs.

Springfield is blessed to have more than 100 parks and connected to more than 100 miles of trails that make walking, biking and other outdoor recreation a hallmark of our community. We particularly want to thank the members of Praise Assembly for creating a new community playground in an area in north Springfield where there was a demonstrated need. The church is on the northern most point of the City limits line and this new playground will certainly serve as a beautiful, welcoming site.

Springfield continues to secure a reputation as a sports town, thanks to the City's purchase of Hammons Field and a number of large projects aimed at providing better access to modern fields and facilities. Phase I of reconstruction at Cooper Soccer Complex will add 8 turf fields and Phase II at Killian Softball/Cooper Baseball will add 11 new fields, to be underway in 2024, anticipated openings the following year.

The projects invest \$7.3 million from City ARPA funding, \$13.5 million from State of Missouri funding plus funding from the Springfield -Greene County Park Board, Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau and Lakes Country Soccer and private donors.

The City also entered into an agreement with the builders of Betty and Bobby Allison Sports Town – a \$30 million dollar sports complex - to fund \$2 million of required public improvements, which will be reimbursed by Community Improvement District funds.

In talking with Mark Hecquet recently – Mark is the new president of the Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau – he emphasized the importance of sports tourism in Springfield. Mark described the growth of Sports Tourism as presenting unprecedented economic and community opportunities. With continued facility enhancements, there is no reason why Springfield cannot be a leader in this industry. Mark is new to Springfield and here today. Please join me in giving a warm Springfield welcome to Mark Hecquet (heck-ee)

Throughout 2022, following the pandemic, the men and women of the Springfield Police Department reconnected with the citizens of Springfield. SPD emphasized a departmental-wide philosophy of community policing by engaging daily with members in every area of our community. The duties, responsibilities, and expectations of the police in today's ever-changing environment are widespread. In 2022, SPD focused on two main areas: crime prevention and reduction, and recruitment and retention.

SPD utilized new equipment and innovative programs including a mental health co-responder program with Burrell Behavioral Health, Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety, and additional public information and educational materials to help prevent and combat crime.

Community response to crime prevention efforts have also helped lead to a reduction in reported crime across the board. Overall, crime in Springfield in 2022 was down 17 percent. This includes a 5.1 percent decrease in crimes against persons, 21 percent decrease in crimes against property and a 19.2 percent decrease in crimes against society. While it is too early to call it a trend, it certainly is very encouraging. Less violent crime and fewer property crimes increased the community's overall sense of safety and security.

Gun violence, however, continues to affect Springfield and has remained the number one priority for the SPD. In 2022, Springfield surpassed 2021 in the total number of shots fired calls, the number of individuals injured because of shots fired and the number of illegal guns seized by SPD.

I would like to draw attention to one particular issue and that is the issue of addressing sexual assault. Springfield, like most cities across the country, has experienced a backlog of unprocessed sexual assault kits. I am pleased to share, however, that all of the previously unsubmitted sexual assault cases that were outsourced through the Missouri Highway Patrol's lab have been completed and the reports have been mailed to Springfield Police.

Highway Patrol lab officials acknowledged the extra effort by Detective Ethan Ramsey in assisting with completing these cases. Since these were older cases there was not a specific detective assigned to them. The lab contacted Detective Ramsey to assist in clarifying any case information. Detective Ramsey was described as a valuable resource and was instrumental in assisting the lab with the completion of this project. Detective Ramsey, please stand and be recognized.

A supportive and grateful community helped SPD return to pre-pandemic numbers of police applicants. Two basic academies had more than 20 recruits and the number of lateral hires doubled in 2022 over 2021.

Through it all, the men and women who have accepted the call to serve and protect the citizens of Springfield did just that – every day, without fail. Would the members of the Springfield Police Department and the Springfield Police Officers' Association please stand and be recognized? ((applause))

2022 was a year of realized potential for the City of Springfield Fire Department and our community – a celebration of the interconnected efforts of the Fire

Department, community partners and neighbors to create a fire safe community in which we can all be proud.

Community Risk Reduction programs were very active with the return of fire and life safety education programs in a partnership with Springfield Public Schools, which placed your firefighters in 613 classrooms, educating over 13,000 children.

The department continues to make advancements through engineering and code enforcement, making sure buildings are being constructed consistent with the Fire Code and are safe prior to occupancy.

The city had zero fire-related fatalities in 2022, an accomplishment never before documented for our community and something we all should celebrate. Would the members of the Springfield Fire Department and the International Association of Fire Fighters please stand and be recognized? ((applause))

One of our great American leaders, President Abraham Lincoln, is referenced in Doris Kearns Goodwin's book, "Leadership in Turbulent Times." I read this book initially when it was released in 2018. I read it again during the pandemic. And then, I read it a third time after the pandemic. Lincoln was known for having an acute sense of timing, perhaps the secret to his gifted leadership. A journalist quoted in the book described him in this way: "he always moves in conjunction with circumstances, not waiting to be dragged by the force of events or wasting strength in premature struggles with them."



Balancing how and when to act is an issue that all leaders must face. I am fortunate to work alongside gifted leaders – both elected and appointed – who seek that balance of energy that President Lincoln exhibited.

I want to thank and recognize my fellow members of City Council and if you would please hold your applause until we have recognized all eight members. Council members, please stand when your name is called.

Mayor Pro Tem Matthew Simpson; Heather Hardinger - General Seat A; Craig Hosmer - General Seat B; Callie Carroll - General Seat C; Derek Lee - General Seat D; Monica Horton - Zone 1; Abe McGull - Zone 2 Brandon Jenson - Zone 3. Would you please join me in recognizing this fine group of leaders.

The City of Springfield is run by a superb professional staff led by City Manager Jason Gage and Deputy City Managers Collin Quigley and Maurice Jones. I have the privilege with working with our City Manager daily and can assure you that he approaches his job in these often turbulent times with the highest of ethics, accountability, transparency, respect, collaboration and discipline. He is a true professional and public servant often unfairly criticized for doing his job. and protecting the best interests of the City. Springfield is indeed fortunate to have him at the helm. Jason, Collin and Maurice - will you please stand and be recognized?

More than two dozen department heads run the day-to-day operations of the City, and their service and dedication is unmatched. I often say this work is not for the faint of heart. Please join me in thanking our City Leadership Team as they stand.

Across the street, in what we call Government Way, our esteemed colleagues are working to help secure a brighter future for all who live in Greene County. Thank you Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon and Associate Commissioners Rusty Maclachlin and John Russell. Please stand and be recognized, representing the elected officials and staff at Greene County.

Do leaders shape the times or do the times summon their leader?

I believe it is a little bit of both. It is more complicated than ever to strengthen our community fabric. Build bridges. Not divides. See in one another, what we desire most to see in ourselves. I see this community as a beautiful tapestry woven from a variety of faces, ideals, opinions and backgrounds. Rather than allow division to unravel these threads, let us work together to mend them.

Work continues across all business and social sectors to adopt the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality Work Group's recommendations initially brought forward in 2022. The initiative was established to develop guiding principles to improve equitable access to opportunities, recognizing the inherent dignity, value and worth of each individual. It is rewarding to see shared values accepted and acted upon. I continue to appreciate the work of that 18-member diverse group.

As I conclude my comments here today, I would like for you to think about ways you can connect with others, fostering unity. Whether it be celebrating with neighbors and co-workers, addressing matters on your mind, or gathering information on which to make important life decisions, please choose to be engaged.

The United States Surgeon General recently sounded the alarm on loneliness and isolation, providing guidance on the healing effects of social connection and community. I am thankful to people like Brian McDonough, General Manager of KY3, who understands this and is partnering with the City in many ways to promote coming together. It turns out, our health depends on it. In recent years, about one-in-two adults in America reported experiencing loneliness. Our friends at CoxHealth, Mercy, Burrell, The Jordan Valley Community Health Center and Springfield-Greene County Health Department can tell you that loneliness and isolation is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and community health. It is associated with a greater risk of disease and even death. And the harmful consequences of a community that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations. Like cities around the country, we are experiencing a decline in all types of group participation, such as church, civic clubs and even social engagements. Let's turn that around. Activities, like Clean Green Springfield, and the United Way Day of Caring where hundreds of people show up to help make Springfield better – and events such as the Mayor's Tree Lighting, the Birthplace of Route 66 Festival and Celebrate Springfield, give me hope. Again, we cannot let disagreements divide us. We are more alike than we are different.

Each of us can start now, in our own lives, by strengthening our connections and relationships. Our individual relationships can help us live healthier, more productive, and more fulfilled lives. Make time to share a meal with a neighbor. Turn off your digital devices and really listen. Volunteer in the community. The keys to connection are simple, but extraordinarily powerful.

As Albert Einstein once said, “Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving forward.”